

Says All Facility Reviews Must Be Made Public

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MEDIA, PA -- Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) submitted a bill to require the Department of Veterans Affairs to publish and make publicly available inspections of Veterans Administration (VA) facilities within 30 days after the completion of a review. As a 31-year Navy Veteran and the highest ranking former officer to ever serve in Congress, Congressman Sestak has made this bill a part of an effort to work for accountability in, and full public trust for, the VA. The introduction of the Transparency for Americas Heroes Act, which stipulates that these records must be easily accessible and placed on the Departments website, comes after the recent release of a disturbing Long-Term Care Institute report on past conditions at Philadelphia's Community Living Center. That report was disseminated only following a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by the media and after VA protocol had prevented dissemination of the document.

"The public should have had immediate access to all such reports including the three done at the Community Living Center so there can be a full accounting of any deficiencies in care," said Congressman Sestak, a former 3-star admiral who previously expressed his concern about a lack of transparency in a letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. "The failure to provide a sanitary and safe environment for residents in this case is even more problematic when the truth is hidden from the public, resulting in a lack of faith in the care the VA provides. If there are other known instances of inadequate VA care, they should be disclosed immediately with confirmation of the appropriate corrective action taken."

In Pennsylvania, nursing homes are inspected annually by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, which requires that anyone can ask to see a copy of this report at any nursing home, and the survey results are posted online. This kind of transparency -- which enables accountability and reform -- is the least we can do for America's heroes.

As another part of his effort to ensure accountability, Congressman Sestak has also emphasized the need to determine why two initial reviews did not reveal the problems documented in the Long Term Care report and whether appropriate criteria are consistently used in similar investigations at VA facilities. With the introduction of his legislation, he has stressed the determination with which he, his colleagues and the VA must work together to turn the page to a new era for the agency one in which funds are sufficiently allocated to provide the benefits our Veterans have earned, and in which Congress and all VA officials maintain an unwavering focus on full accountability, transparency and oversight for how resources are implemented.